

**Amendments to the Specification:**

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 5, line 12, with the following rewritten paragraph:

The captured character image is rendered accessible to feature extraction apparatus. In a typical implementation, the feature extraction apparatus is programmed to algorithmically generate pixel-run representations of the character image and filter predetermined features in accordance with a set of extraction parameters. The character image is scanned along a plurality of parallel scan lines oriented at each scan angle of a predetermined set of scan angles, wherein each scan line of a selected set of scan lines oriented in accordance with each scan angle passes through each of (a) a character pixel-run including at least one character pixel and (b) at least one background pixel. The feature extraction apparatus, based on the directional scans through character pixels and contrasting background pixels, assemble a feature vector (e.g., a set of numeric data) indicative of the algorithmically extracted features.